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Contrastive Self-Knowledge

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1. Introduction

In this paper, I draw on a recent account of perceptual knowledge according to which knowledge is contrastive.¹ I extend the contrastive account of perceptual knowledge to yield a contrastive account of *self*-knowledge. Along the way, I develop a contrastive account of the propositional attitudes (beliefs, desires, regrets and so on) and suggest that a contrastive account of the propositional attitudes implies an anti-individualist account of propositional attitude concepts (the concepts of belief, desire, regret, and so on).

There are two immediate reasons to investigate the plausibility of a contrastive account of self-knowledge. The first concerns the possibility of a unified account of propositional knowledge. Our epistemic talk is apt to suggest that there are different kinds of propositional knowledge. Thus we talk of mathematical knowledge, moral knowledge, perceptual knowledge, self-knowledge and so on, sometimes aiming to distinguish features of the knowledge in question that mark it out as specifically *that* kind of propositional knowledge. But the differences between so-called ‘kinds’ of propositional knowledge are not differences between *kinds of knowledge* at all. The real epistemic difference lies not with the ‘kind’ of knowledge but with the nature of the entitlements that attach to beliefs acquired in different ways: through reasoning, through perception, through memory, through testimony,

¹ See for example Karjalainen & Morton (2003), Schaffer (2004, 2005a, 2007, 2008) and Morton & Karjalainen (2008).

through self-awareness, and so on.² The term ‘knowledge’, in its propositional sense at least, plausibly expresses a single, unified concept.³ If this is right, then we should aim towards a single, unified account of propositional knowledge that is applicable across the board. The plausibility of a contrastive account of self-knowledge, then, will have implications for the plausibility of a contrastive account of perceptual knowledge.⁴

The second reason to investigate the plausibility of a contrastive account of self-knowledge concerns the transparency of belief. Evans articulates the transparency thesis by way of the following example:

[I]n making a self-ascription of belief, one's eyes are, so to speak, or occasionally literally, directed outward—upon the world. If someone asks me ‘Do you think there is going to be a third world war?’, I must attend, in answering him, to precisely the same outward phenomena as I would attend to if I were answering the question ‘Will there be a third world war?’ (Evans 1982, 225)

According to Evans, then, at least in some cases, in order to determine whether one believes that *p*, one must try to determine whether it is the case that *p*, and one does this by examining the relevant evidence regarding *p*. But if knowledge of the world is contrastive, and our beliefs are at least sometimes transparent in the sense that in order to determine what we

² I say nothing of such entitlements here.

³ I set aside the question of whether there are kinds of knowledge which are essentially non-propositional. It may be that practical knowledge, such as the knowledge involved in knowing how to ride a bicycle, cannot be reduced to propositional knowledge. My concern here is specifically with the possibility of a unified account of propositional knowledge.

⁴ There are formally related questions concerning the possibility of a contrastive account of mathematical and moral knowledge, which I leave for another occasion.

believe we must look to the world, then there is reason to think knowledge of our beliefs will be contrastive too.

With these two motivating reasons as background, I turn to the contrastive account of perceptual knowledge.

2. Perceptual knowledge

According to the traditional account of knowledge, knowledge is a binary categorical relation holding between a subject and a proposition known: K_{sp} (S knows that p). According to the contrastive account of knowledge, knowledge is a ternary, contrastive relation holding between a subject, a proposition and a contrast class: K_{spq} (S knows that p rather than that q). There are three immediate points to note. First, the contrast class denoted by 'q' is a set of propositions rather than a single proposition. Second, the contrast class denoted by 'q' will typically contain *some but not all* propositions that contrast with p. As a result, the set of propositions in the contrast class will typically not be equivalent to $\sim p$. Third, the following are to be distinguished: (a) 'S knows that p rather than that q', which represents knowledge as genuinely contrastive; (b) 'S knows that (p rather than q)', which represents non-contrastive knowledge of a contrastive proposition; (c) 'S knows that p rather than knows that q', which represents a contrast between what S non-contrastively knows, and what she doesn't.⁵ The question is: what would favour a contrastive account of perceptual knowledge over a non-contrastive account? And in answer, we look to four distinct phenomena: evidence; explanation; discriminatory capacities; and question-relativity.⁶

⁵ It has been claimed that contrastive knowledge can be reduced to non-contrastive knowledge (see van Woudenberg (2008) and Buening (2010)). I do not find these arguments persuasive and leave them to one side here.

⁶ The four phenomena I mention here as favouring the contrastivity of perceptual knowledge are not to be taken as exhaustive. There are others provided both by Karjalainen & Morton (op. cit.) and by Schaffer (op. cit.). I

2.1 Evidence

Support by adequate evidence is a central component of the concept of knowledge: the more evidence you have in favour of a hypothesis h , the stronger your claim to know that h is true. But evidence is contrastive (evidence discriminates some but not all alternatives). Hence, plausibly, knowledge based on evidence will be contrastive. To borrow an example from Karjalainen & Morton (2003), Hellenistic astronomers had evidence that discriminates a spherical earth from a flat one, but did not have evidence that discriminates a spherical earth from one that is spherical except for indentations at the poles. So Hellenistic astronomers who believed the earth to be round would have had true beliefs which their evidence discriminated from some but not all false alternatives. Plausibly, the astronomers knew that the earth was spherical rather than that it was flat, but they didn't know that it was spherical rather than that it was spherical-with-indentations. Here, the knowledge inherits the contrastivity of the evidence.

To take a second example, suppose a woodland tracker comes across a set of tracks recently left by a brown rat in a remote part of woodland. Given her knowledge of the different tracks various native animals leave, she has evidence—the particular markings of the prints in the dirt before her—that discriminates a brown rat from a fox, a deer, a badger, an otter, and so on having made them. But her evidence doesn't distinguish a brown rat having made them from a child having made them with a wooden brown-rat-track-stamper that his parents bought him in the woodland shop. The tracker, then, might know that a brown rat had recently passed by rather than a fox, a deer, a badger or an otter, but not know that a

mention these four in particular because of their intuitive appeal and their relation to the question of whether self-knowledge and the propositional attitudes more generally are contrastive (for more on which, see below).

brown rat had recently passed by rather than that a child with a wooden stamper had recently passed by. And again, here the knowledge inherits the contrastivity of the evidence.

2.2 Explanation

Empirical knowledge is often tied to explanation. To explain is to know why. But explanation is contrastive in two senses. First, a claim counts as an explanation only relative to a contrast class.⁷ Here is a well-known example from the literature on explanation. Paresis is an illness that is only contracted by those who have latent, untreated syphilis. But only a low percentage of those with the condition contract paresis. Suppose that Geoff has latent, untreated syphilis, that he is the only member of the local golf club to have latent, untreated syphilis, but that he is one of seven brothers all of whom have the condition. Then the fact that he has latent, untreated syphilis explains why he rather than any other member of his golf club contracted paresis, but does not explain why he rather than any of his brothers did. His doctor, then, may know why Geoff rather than any other member of the golf club contracted paresis, but not know why Geoff rather than any of his brothers did. Here, the knowledge inherits the contrastivity of the explanation.

The second sense in which explanation is contrastive is that we explain why this rather than that happened. Thus the fact that the ball hit the window at a 45 degree angle may explain why it bounced off at a 45 degree angle rather than a 70 degree angle, but it doesn't explain why it bounced off at a 45 degree angle rather than smashing straight through. Accordingly, Betty may know why the ball bounced off the window at a 45 degree angle

⁷ See for example Van Fraassen (1980). Van Fraassen draws on the study of why-questions in Bromberger (1966) to support the claim that an explanation is an answer to a why-question. There is a direct relation between Van Fraassen's account of explanation and the question-relativity of knowledge discussed in section 2.4 below.

rather than at a 70 degree angle, but not know why it bounced off at a 45 degree angle rather than smashing straight through. To take a different example, the temperature may explain why it is snowing rather than raining; but it doesn't explain why it is snowing rather than dry. Hence Sally may know why it is snowing rather than raining, and yet not know why it is snowing rather than dry. And again, the knowledge inherits the contrastivity of the explanation.

One might be tempted at this point to think that the examples just presented are not examples of explanations at all, but are instead examples of 'incomplete' explanations, where an incomplete explanation is not really an explanation at all (in the same way that an incomplete car isn't really a car). Genuine explanations, one might think, are essentially complete and non-contrastive, which undercuts the motivation for thinking that knowledge grounded in explanation is contrastive. After all, if explanation is non-contrastive, knowledge grounded in explanation cannot inherit any contrastivity from it. Moreover, 'incomplete' explanations, according to this line of thought, are simply not fit to ground knowledge because they are not really explanations at all. But there is an error in this line of reasoning. Perhaps an omniscient individual who had a comprehensive understanding of the workings of the world would be in a position to offer a complete explanation of any given phenomenon, and perhaps, accordingly, the states of knowledge of such an individual, even if contrastive, would be equivalent to non-contrastive states of knowledge. After all, an omniscient individual would, perhaps, know that p relative to any other contrasting proposition, and hence would, effectively, know that p rather than that $\sim p$ (this being tantamount to knowing simply that p). But for individuals like us, an understanding of the world is arrived at piecemeal, and our knowledge of the empirical world depends on the discovery of what are here being called 'incomplete' explanations. But there is no reason to think that an incomplete explanation in this sense is not a genuine explanation. That would constitute too

great a concession to the sceptic and puts pressure on the very notion of explanation.⁸ There is little temptation to treat evidence that discriminates some but not all possibilities as ‘incomplete’ in the sense of not being genuine evidence and hence as unfit to ground knowledge. This would certainly constitute too great a concession to the sceptic. But evidence and explanation are analogous in this regard. For individuals like us, then, explanations are generally contrastive, as is knowledge based on them.

2.3 Discriminatory capacities

Perceptual knowledge is also often based on discriminatory capacities—the ability to tell one thing from another. But we have limited discriminatory capacities. We get contrastive knowledge when we can discriminate some but not all alternatives. A ewe can discriminate on the basis of smell between its own new-born lamb and the other new-born lambs in the field. But a ewe whose lamb has died can be fooled into taking on an orphaned lamb in its place if the orphaned lamb is wrapped in the hide of the ewe’s own dead lamb, because the ewe cannot discriminate her new-born lamb from a lamb that is wrapped in its hide. The ewe, then, may know that her lamb is suckling rather than that one of the other opportunistic lambs in the field is, but not know that her lamb is suckling rather than an orphaned lamb the farmer has disguised. To take a different example, most of us can discriminate rabbits from dogs up to a certain distance, but we can’t discriminate rabbits from cleverly disguised mechanical rabbits up to the same distance. The farmer, then, may know that there’s a rabbit in her field rather than that there’s a dog there. But she may not know that there’s a rabbit in her field

⁸ Van Fraassen provides some reason to think that an omniscient being would not be correctly understood as having explanations at all. See his (1980), p.130. This would serve simply to strengthen the reply to the objector.

rather than that there's a cleverly disguised mechanical rabbit. Here, the knowledge inherits the contrastivity of the discriminatory capacity.

2.4 Question-relativity

The fourth source of evidence for a contrastive account of perceptual knowledge comes from Schaffer.⁹ Knowledge ascriptions, according to Schaffer, certify that the subject is able to answer the question. But an ability to answer is question-relative. All of the following questions can be answered by 'Colonel Mustard stole the sapphire', but the ability to answer Q1 does not entail the ability to answer Q2 or Q3:

Q1: Did *Colonel Mustard* steal the sapphire or did Miss Scarlet?

Q2: Did Colonel Mustard *steal* the sapphire or did he hide it somewhere for safe-keeping?

Q3: Did Colonel Mustard steal the *sapphire* or the diamond necklace?

Contrastive knowledge is question-relative knowledge. Knowing the identity of the thief, knowing what was done with a particular item, and knowing which item was stolen, are clearly distinct. Differences at q, then, correspond to different abilities to answer different questions. Holmes, then, may know that Colonel Mustard stole the sapphire rather than Miss Scarlet, but know neither that he stole the sapphire rather than hid it, nor that he stole the sapphire rather than the diamond necklace. Here, the knowledge inherits the contrastivity of the ability to answer a question.

2.5 Knowledge and facts

⁹ Op.cit. See also Van Fraassen (1980).

Here we encounter an objection from the metaphysical quarter, which runs as follows. If a subject S knows that p rather than that q, and what S knows is a fact, it looks as if facts must be contrastive. The fact known is, it would seem, the fact that p rather than that q—a contrastive fact. But surely facts aren't themselves contrastive. Hence, knowledge can't be contrastive either. But the objection from the metaphysical quarter is avoided since the conclusion does not follow. Rather, it directs us to a crucial distinction between the *content of the knowledge*, which represents the fact known, and the *state of knowledge of the subject*. The contrastivist should maintain that *states of knowledge* are contrastive, where this is not understood to entail that the *content* of any given state of knowledge (and hence the fact it represents) is contrastive. Thus, when Holmes knows that Colonel Mustard stole the sapphire rather than that Miss Scarlet did, the content of his knowledge, and hence the fact he knows, is simply that Colonel Mustard stole the sapphire. It is Holmes's state of knowledge rather than its content that is contrastive. To know a fact, then, is not to know that fact *simpliciter* (this is the non-contrastivist's mistake), but to know in contrast to some other set of possible facts that it obtains. As such, our metaphysics need not be contrastive just because our states of knowledge are.¹⁰

A contrastivist account according to which states of knowledge are not determined by their content clearly makes the individuation of knowledge more complex than a non-contrastivist account according to which sameness of content implies sameness of state. Suppose Holmes knows that Colonel Mustard stole the sapphire rather than Miss Scarlet, while Watson knows that Colonel Mustard stole the sapphire rather than the diamond

¹⁰ There may, of course, be independent reason to think that metaphysics is contrastive. See for example Corbi and Prades (1999) on the contrastivity of facts, and Hitchcock (1996), Woodward (2003), Maslen (2004) and Schaffer (2005b) on the contrastivity of causation. But the contrastivity of knowledge does not itself imply a contrastive metaphysics, and in particular does not imply the contrastivity of facts.

necklace. In this example, there is a sense in which Holmes and Watson know the same thing, since they are in states of knowledge with the same content. But there is also a sense in which they do not know the same thing, since they are in different states of knowledge—after all, they know that Colonel Mustard stole the sapphire relative to different contrasts. The distinction introduced here—that between the content of knowledge on the one hand and the state of knowledge on the other—is significant in its own right, but will prove to be of particular significance in the contrastive account of self-knowledge developed below.

3. A contrastive account of the propositional attitudes

The reasons that favour the contrastivity of knowledge also, in a relatively straightforward manner, seem to favour the contrastivity of belief: beliefs can be based on what we take to be evidence; beliefs can be based on what we take to be explanatory grounds; beliefs can be based on what we take to be our discriminatory capacities; and beliefs dictate which questions we take ourselves to be able to answer. Moreover, if knowledge is contrastive, then there is reason to think that belief is also contrastive, so long as we think knowledge is belief of a certain kind – true, warranted belief, say.¹¹ But just as we need to distinguish between the content of knowledge and the state of knowing, we need to distinguish between the content of belief and the state of believing. The content of any given belief is non-contrastive. What is believed when one believes that p rather than that q is: p. It is the *state of believing* that is contrastive. To believe that p is not to believe that p *simpliciter* (this is the non-contrastivist's mistake), but to believe in contrast to some other set of propositions that p.

¹¹ We need to be careful here, of course, because truth is also connected to evidence, explanation, discrimination and questions, and we ought not thereby conclude that truth is contrastive. But the most plausible source of the contrastivity of knowledge is, I think, the contrastivity of belief, rather than either the contrastivity of truth or the contrastivity of warrant.

Given this distinction between the content of a belief and the state of believing, an individuation question arises. Suppose that Irene believes that *p* rather than that *q*, and that Ishka believes that *p* rather than that *r*. The question then arises: do Irene and Ishka believe the same thing? The answer, of course, is: yes and no. There is a proposition which they both believe, which means they each have a belief with the same content. But they do not believe the proposition relative to the same contrast class, which means that they are not in the same psychological state. The original question, then—Do Irene and Ishka believe the same thing?—has to be answered ‘yes’ and ‘no’ because it is ambiguous. If the question is whether they have a belief with the same content, then the answer is unequivocally ‘yes’. If the question is whether they are in the same psychological state, then the answer is unequivocally ‘no’. The conjunction of sameness of content and difference of psychological state is plausible in this case, since there will be potential similarities and potential differences in the behaviour that result from the sameness of content and the simultaneous difference between the belief states of Irene and Ishka. To have a belief, then, is not to stand in the belief-relation to a single proposition, but to stand in the belief-relation to a proposition relative to a set of contrasting propositions. To believe is to be located in propositional space.¹²

On the face of it, other propositional attitudes will need separate treatment: after all, they don’t obviously relate to evidence, explanation, discriminatory capacities or knowledge in the same way as belief. However, a number of the other propositional attitudes depend first, on the beliefs an individual has, and, second, on what alternatives the individual has in mind. The contrastivity of a number of other propositional attitudes, then, might be argued for on these two grounds. Take, for example, the attitudes of wanting something, being

¹² There will often be cases where two individuals believe the same thing in the sense of having beliefs with the same content, where the beliefs are based on different evidence. The difference in evidence in such cases will typically result in different belief states precisely because of the contrastivity of evidence; but the difference in evidence need not result in a difference in content.

surprised by something, and regretting something: what we want depends in part on what we believe our options are; what we are surprised by depends in part on a combination of what we previously believed was likely and what we subsequently believe happened; and what we regret depends in part on a combination of what we believe happened and what we believe could have been otherwise. And, indeed, if we look at examples, it is plausible to think that these propositional attitudes are contrastive. Thus Alex may be surprised that Chris invited her to the cinema rather than to the pub, but not surprised that she invited her to the cinema rather than home to meet her mother. Betty may regret that she gave her child's clothes to Maureen rather than to Maude, but not regret that she gave her clothes to Maureen rather than throwing them away. Polly may want to go to the cinema rather than stay at home, but not want to go to the cinema rather than go to the party. In all these cases the individuals have a contrastive propositional attitude, which is to say that they each stand in a specific attitudinal relation to a given proposition relative to a set of contrasting propositions.

4. Contrastive self-knowledge

The propositional attitudes, then, seem to exhibit the same kind of contrastivity as perceptual knowledge. But the contrastivity of belief remains pivotal. And at this point we need to take a step back. While the considerations adduced so far may support the dual claims first, that *knowledge about the world* is contrastive, and second, that *beliefs about the world* are contrastive, it's not obvious that they support either the claim that *self-knowledge* is contrastive or the claim that *beliefs about one's own mental states* are contrastive. After all, self-knowledge and second-order beliefs are often thought precisely *not* to be evidence-based, explanation-based, or discriminative in form.¹³ It may be, then, that self-knowledge is *non-*

¹³ As we will see later, there is a sense in which self-knowledge and second-order belief are discriminative in form.

contrastive knowledge of contrastive mental states, and likewise that second-order beliefs are *non-contrastive beliefs of contrastive mental states*. However, an account of contrastive self-knowledge and contrastive second-order belief does emerge from considerations of *transparency* and from considerations of *question-relativity*.¹⁴

4.1 Transparency and contrastive self-knowledge

In section 1, I drew on Evans's account of the transparency of belief. According to the transparency thesis, sometimes in determining what we believe, we do not look *inward*, as the term 'introspection' implies, rather we look *outward* to the world. Sometimes, then, we come to know whether we believe that *p*, by determining whether it is the case that *p*, and we do this by examining the relevant evidence regarding *p*. But if knowledge of the world is contrastive, and our beliefs are at least sometimes transparent in the sense that in order to determine what we believe we must look to the world, then there is reason to think knowledge of our beliefs will be contrastive too. One way to put this is to say that sometimes the very same body of evidence that favours a subject's first-order belief that *p*, also (and thereby) favours her second-order belief that she believes that *p*. Hence, at least in such cases, the first-order and second-order beliefs will have the same addicity. This means that if perceptual knowledge is contrastive, there is reason to think self-knowledge is contrastive also.

A clarification is in order. To put things in terms of the same body of evidence favouring *S*'s belief that *p* and *S*'s belief that she believes that *p* is obviously to put things in a non-contrastive way. In contrastive terms we have: the body of evidence that favours *S*'s belief that *p* rather than that *q* also favours *S*'s belief that she believes that *p* rather than that she believes that *q*. I'll return to the question of whether this is the right way to put things in

¹⁴ See Aikin (2006) for a different kind of discussion of the contrastivity of self-attributions.

section 4.4 below. First, let us look briefly at question-relativity to see how that might be thought to favour a contrastive account of self-knowledge.

4.2 Question relativity and contrastive self-knowledge

Just as an ability to answer questions about the world is question-relative, an ability to answer questions *about one's own mental states* is question-relative. All of the following questions can be answered by 'I want a Nintendo ds for my birthday', but the ability to answer Q4 does not entail an ability to answer Q5 or Q6.

Q4: Do *you* hope for a Nintendo ds for your birthday or does your cousin?

Q5: Do you *hope* for a Nintendo ds for your birthday or expect to get one?

Q6: Do you hope for *a Nintendo ds* for your birthday or a Nintendo dsi?

Ascriptions of self-knowledge to others demonstrate the contrastive, question-relative nature of self-knowledge. Differences at q correspond to different abilities to answer different questions. Thus, a boy may know that it's him rather than his cousin who hopes for a Nintendo ds for his birthday, but know neither that he hopes for it rather than *expects* it (since, being young, he generally runs together hope and expectation), nor that he hopes for a Nintendo ds rather than a *Nintendo dsi* (since he's insufficiently informed to know the difference). The contrasts here concern *the subject*, *the attitude* and *the content* of the mental state in question respectively. These will be the options generally when it is self-knowledge that is at issue. I return to these in section 4.4 below.

4.3 An objection: iteration of contrasts

At this point an objection arises.¹⁵ Suppose:

(i) S believes that p rather than that q

Then, we might think, S's knowing what she thinks would be represented as:

(ii) S knows that [she believes that p rather than that q]

where the square brackets mark out the content of S's belief. But this is surely a representation of an instance of *non-contrastive* self-knowledge. It looks, then, as if S's knowing *contrastively* what she thinks ought to be represented as:

(iii) S knows that [she believes that p rather than that q], rather than that [she believes that r rather than that s]

But this would make self-knowledge much more complex a matter than is plausible, and the content of the knowledge would become increasingly complex as the order of knowledge rose. What has gone wrong? The answer lies in the distinction I drew earlier between the content of a subject's belief and a subject's state of believing. The current objection assumes illegitimately that a belief is contrastive in virtue of having a contrastive content. But, I have argued, the contrastivity of belief is properly located not in the *content* of a belief (which may or may not be contrastive), but in the subject's *state of believing*. To return to the current example, the content of S's belief when she believes that p rather than that q is not contrastive, it is simply: p. But she is in a contrastive state of belief.

4.4 A proper account of contrastive self-knowledge

So, supposing again:

¹⁵ Thanks to Lucy O'Brien for raising this objection in the context of an earlier, spoken version of the paper.

(i) S believes that p rather than that q

S's self-knowledge would be correctly represented as:

(iv) S knows that [she believes that p] rather than that S* ψ s that q

Where S* marks out a contrast in the subject of the first-order attitude (in this case S), ψ marks out a contrast in the first-order attitude taken towards the proposition (in this case belief), and q marks out a contrast in the proposition to which that attitude is taken (in this case p). In cases of self-knowledge, then, the content of the second-order belief matches the content of the first-order psychological state. When S knows she has a belief with the content p, she will be in a state of belief that places her in relation not only to the proposition that she believes that p (the proposition that provides the content of her self-knowledge) but also to a set of propositions which differ from it along any or all of the three specified dimensions. Let me say a word about each of these dimensions.

There are a number of different situations in which the contrast with the *subject-place* becomes pertinent. Here are two examples—the first an example of self-knowledge that draws an explicit contrast in the subject-place, the second an example of a lack of self-knowledge that draws an explicit contrast in the subject-place. Suppose that several friends are discussing what to do with a small amount of money they've won together in a charity raffle. During the discussion, Nadia suggests they treat themselves to a night out, and Charlie suggests they give it all back to the charity. After a short while, and in an attempt to draw the discussion to a close, Debbie says, 'So, Charlie thinks we ought to have a night out, Nadia thinks we ought to give the money back to the charity,...'. On hearing this, Charlie says, '*I'm* the one who thinks we ought to give the money back to the charity—not Nadia'. In this example, Charlie knows that *she* thinks the money should be given back to the charity rather

than that *Nadia* thinks the money should be given back to the charity. The contrast here is explicitly a contrast in the subject-place of the proposition known. Moreover, her knowledge is clearly contrastive, as she may not know that she thinks the money should be given back to the charity rather than that *Debbie* thinks the money should be given back to the charity, because she may not know what Debbie thinks. For the second example, suppose that in the course of the discussion, Fifi argues in favour of giving half the money back to the charity and buying a take-away with the other half, while Connie argues fervently that instead they give half the money to charity, but decide which charity to give it to while they have a take-away bought with the other half. After some time, with a whole host of different suggestions on the table, Connie becomes confused about who thinks what, and says, ‘Do *I* think we ought to give half the money back to the charity, or is that Fifi?’. Here, plausibly, Connie does not know that she thinks they ought to give half the money back to a charity to be decided later, precisely because she does not know (because she can’t remember) whether it is her or Fifi who thinks it. One might interpret this scenario as a scenario in which Connie *believed* at the time when she was arguing her case that they ought to give half the money back to a charity to be decided later, but does not believe so at the time when she asks the question. However, Connie’s first-order belief should not be understood as dependent on her self-knowledge, and hence should not be construed as absent because of her doubt. Moreover, a minor amendment to the story can undermine this interpretation in favour of the preferable interpretation according to which Connie’s first-order belief remains through her confused state. Suppose, then, that she would readily accept the belief as hers on minimal prompting such as, ‘Remember—you said that you thought we should consider other charities as well.’ It would be odd to think that Connie’s belief had temporarily disappeared while her attention had wandered, and it is more natural to think of her belief as remaining but not being one of which she was constantly consciously aware.

Let me turn now to the *attitude-place* of the proposition known. The kind of example here emerges when a subject cannot distinguish subtly different attitudes. The example of the child who possesses the concept of wanting, but cannot distinguish want from expectation, is one such example. But for any example of this kind to be intelligible, it must be possible to think with a concept which one grasps incompletely. And this is possible only if propositional attitude concepts are anti-individualistically individuated.¹⁶ According to the anti-individualist, which concepts a subject possesses is in part determined by her relations to her environment. More specifically, the anti-individualist maintains that concepts are public entities which different people can grasp to different extents. It is only if the identity of a concept possessed by an individual is determined by facts outside the individual—facts that go beyond her individual understanding of the concept—that a concept can be public in this sense. In the case of propositional attitude concepts, the question of whether the environmental factors are best understood as socio-linguistic or not depends on whether propositional attitude concepts refer to natural kinds. I am inclined to think they are, but for present purposes this question is secondary to the question of whether it is possible to possess a propositional attitude concept incompletely.

According to the individualist, in contrast, the concept a subject possesses is determined by how that individual subject uses the concept. Thus if the child in the example uses the term ‘want’ in such a way that it covers cases of both want and expectation, then, according to the individualist, the concept expressed by an utterance of ‘want’ by the child is not the concept of wanting at all, but rather the concept of wanting-or-expecting. But if the propositional attitude concepts are individuated by how the subject employs them, then this leaves no room for a contrast in the attitude-place of self-knowledge at all. This is because any given propositional attitude concept possessed by a subject would of necessity be

¹⁶ For the anti-individualist position generally see Burge (1986). See also Sawyer (2007) and (2011).

distinguishable by that subject from all others. If we are to make sense of a contrast in the attitude-place of the propositions that provide the contents of self-knowledge, then, we must be anti-individualists about propositional attitude concepts.¹⁷

Finally, the relevant class of contrasting propositions for a state of self-knowledge may contain propositions that contrast with the *content-place* of the proposition known. One kind of example of the contrast in content emerges when there are states of affairs in the world that the subject cannot distinguish from the state of affairs she represents in thought. This ties in to the contrastivity of first-order knowledge and belief, and relates particularly to the contrastivity of our discriminatory capacities.

There are three points to note, points which parallel the three points concerning contrastive perceptual knowledge made at the beginning of section 2 above. First, the contrast class in the case of self-knowledge is a set of propositions concerning attitudinal relations between subjects and propositions. Second, the contrast class will contain *some but not all* of those propositions. Third, the following are to be distinguished: (a) ‘S knows that she ϕ s that p rather than that S* ψ s that q’, which represents self-knowledge as genuinely contrastive; (b) ‘S knows that (she ϕ s that p rather than S* ψ s that q)’, which represents non-contrastive knowledge of a contrastive first-order ascription; and (c) ‘S knows that she ϕ s that p rather than knows that S* ψ s that q’, which represents a contrast between non-contrastive states of self-knowledge.

And there is another parallel. In the case of perceptual knowledge, knowing that p rather than that q does not require that you know what the contrast class denoted by ‘q’ is—

¹⁷ The individualist could, of course, bite the bullet here and maintain that contrastive questions relating to the attitude-place of propositional attitudes such as ‘do you want it or expect it?’ make no sense to subjects who cannot distinguish the concepts involved. However, in so far as the questions do seem to make sense, the onus is on the individualist to explain why they should not be understood as such.

you need not be able to *articulate* that contrast class. The contrast class will be determined by practical abilities you have independently of whether you are aware of those abilities or can articulate them. Similarly, self-knowledge consists in standing in a certain relation to a proposition relative to other, contrasting propositions; but again, it does not require in addition that you know the contrast class of propositions relative to which you stand in that relation to the proposition that provides the content of your second-order belief. Just like in the perceptual case, the contrast class will be determined by abilities you have rather than by any conceptual awareness of them as contrasting propositions; but unlike the perceptual case, the relevant abilities in the case of self-knowledge will be largely conceptual abilities.¹⁸

If this is right, then self-knowledge involves a subject standing in relation to a complex network of propositions determined in part by her conceptual abilities. Some of these conceptual abilities are specifically abilities that relate to the propositional attitude concepts (the concept of belief, desire, regret, and so on). And it is the contrastivity of such concepts that implies that a contrastive account of self-knowledge will be specifically anti-individualist in nature.

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¹⁸ I do not mean to imply that a conceptual ability is not a kind of practical ability, but rather that some practical abilities are not conceptual abilities.

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